The Fourth Angle of the Leadership Triangle

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ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the differentiating elements of military and corporate leadership and analyses what are the main factors which contribute to the difference, It also touches on the aspects of discipline in both these fields. The paper argues that leadership has three angles which go to form the entire leadership triangle, and these are a) people skills, b) knowing the job, and c) having a vision or purpose. The fourth angle for the purposes of this paper, is made up of corporate leadership and services (armed forces) leadership as these are the two principal areas in which leadership reveals itself. It concludes by indicating that the factor which sets corporate discipline apart from military discipline is the element of 'democratic discipline' present in the former category. By this we mean that an order in the corporate world can be questioned; it cannot be so questioned in the military world.

KEYWORDS: leadership, discipline, trust, culture, risk taking, Level 5 leaders, Indian army

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The Setting

The objective of this section is to give an insight into some in notorious for their unpredictability to act rationally. The current aspects relating to leadership which to us is the leader should be aware of this very basic fact. ability to get along with people and ensure that they willingly do what you want them to do, even though the task may be unpleasant or difficult. A leader has flashes of that kind of insight, dug up from his or her own nature, independent of influences, owing nothing to anyone outside himself. The rational mind is the best one for a leader to possess; tinges of emotionalism detracts from the ability of the leader to lead.

To become an effective leader is not at all easy; it is a skill a manager has to cultivate and become an expert in the area. Leadership at all levels (not necessarily at the level of the CEO) is an integral part of his or her working life. In our experience, successful leadership skills can best be learnt by practically going through the process. It cannot be learnt from articles and books. Nor can it be taught in a classroom or a training program; there are too many imponderables and pitfalls which the trainer or lecturer on leadership creator of a team will have to deal with during the process. It will seem very difficult at first, but as with all things, experience and practice will make the task of leadership easier. The key is to remember that while solving a similar problem in two different geographical locations, or two different organizations, it does not automatically happen that the problem/s can be effectively solved using the same leadership styles. The leader and his team in one location may do the job quickly, efficiently and effectively. In another location, the same type of problem may take a different leader and team a very long time to solve - in many instances they may not even the main reason for this is that teams consist of human beings and human beings are

Think about that definition of trust for a moment. Trust means that you rely on someone else to do the right thing. You believe in the person's integrity and strength, to the extent that you are able to put yourself on the line, at some risk to yourself. It is essential that the leader knows how to build trust. Trust is essential to an effective team, because it provides a sense of safety. When your team members feel safe with each other, they feel comfortable to open up, take appropriate risks, and expose vulnerabilities.

IBM is a great because of things Tom Watson did long before IBM became the monolith that it is today. NIKE is great because of things Phil Knight did when NIKE was a scrappy David taking on Goliaths. 3M is great because William McKnight bent the company to his values decades ago. L.L. Bean is great because of Leon Bean's actions when his tiny company operated out of a single building in Freeport, Maine. So the culture of trust is crucial if a company has to become a great company and survive over the centuries.

The Fourth Angle of the Triangle of Leadership

The paper will now examine the slightly unusual title it has and we will start by looking at the three angles which form the leadership triangle. For us leadership has three angles which go to form the entire leadership triangle, and these are a) people skills, b) knowing the job, and c) having a vision or purpose. These sound simple again but the complexities which lie within the triangle are immense. The most important of the angles is people skills. We identified these three angles through observation and empirical study while we were working in various organizations. Caramela (2018)

said that 'you want your workers to be confident and willing to take risks. Create an innovative atmosphere and lead by example, showing your employees that mistakes are not shortcomings.'

Having looked at the three angles of the triangle, we will now look at the fourth angle referred to in the title. The fourth angle for the purposes of this paper, is made up of corporate leadership and services (armed forces) leadership as these are the two principal areas in which leadership reveals itself. The challenges faced by military or business leaders become more similar the higher one moves up the organizational ladder. People who become leaders in either area typically have similar value systems regarding the larger issues of life. This is more believable for those of us who have had the opportunity to observe both arenas closely i.e. the arena of having actually worked in a corporate or in a wing of the armed forces, which actually is the case. We would however, like to add that the corporate and services leadership have one common unifying element, and that is discipline. Discipline brings these two disparate genres together and we will now examine why we chose discipline as the unifying factor. After all, there could be many more... trust, loyalty, hard work etc., but disciplines stands out from all these others. Discipline is an often misused word; so we would like to clarify what we mean by the word discipline. As Collins (2001) said, 'It all starts with disciplined people. The transition begins not by trying to discipline the wrong people into the right behaviors, but by getting selfdisciplined people on the bus [i.e. into the company] in the first place. Next we have disciplined thought. You need the discipline to confront the brutal facts of reality, while retaining resolute faith that you can and will create a path to greatness. Most importantly, you need the discipline to persist in the search for understanding. Finally, we have disciplined action.... This order is important. Disciplined action without disciplined thought is a recipe for disaster.'

This fourth angle of the leadership triangle is very important and so we will elaborate on the concept of discipline a little bit more. For example, in the chaotic airline environment from 1972 to 2002 filled with fuel shocks, deregulation, labor strife, air-traffic-control strikes, interest-rate spikes, hijackings (including 9/11), recessions, and multiple bankruptcies, Southwest Airlines had a stock return 63 times better than the general stock market. Had you invested \$10,000 in Southwest Airlines on December 31, 1972, it would have been worth \$12 million by the end of 2002. Collins and Hansen (2012) called these companies 10x companies by which they meant companies which are 10 times better than the worst companies in the same field.

How did this company achieve such astounding results in such uncertain environments? Collins and Hansen's extensive research reveals three core behaviors that set such companies apart from their counterparts. The first behavior is 'fanatic discipline'. Discipline is "consistency of action". It is not the same as regimentation, measurement, hierarchical obedience, or adherence to bureaucratic rules. "For a 10xer, the only legitimate form of discipline is self-discipline, having the inner will to do whatever it takes to create a great outcome, no matter how difficult".

Collins and Hansen compared 'Fanatic Discipline' to a 20 Mile March. Imagine you start in San Diego with a goal to march all the way to Maine. Your goal is to march 20-miles per day, every day, regardless of the weather. You do not do

less (you have ambition to achieve), and you do not overreach and do more (you have self-control to hold back). 10x companies identify what their 20-mile march is.

Collins and Hansen observe, "The 20 Mile March creates two types of self-imposed discomfort: (1) the discomfort of unwavering commitment to high performance in difficult conditions, and (2) the discomfort of holding back in good conditions". For example, despite all of the chaos in Southwest Airlines' environment, they generated a profit for 30 consecutive years. However, they were self-disciplined to "hold back in good times so as not to extend beyond its ability to preserve profitability and the Southwest culture".

In this section we have established the fact that discipline is the fourth angle of the leadership triangle. In the coming sections of this paper we will look at what eminent people have said about discipline and also give examples from the corporate and the armed services (in our case, it will be the army because the army in India has the longest tenure in terms of its origins and has a history of values and traditions which are unique). As the official website of the Indian Army says, "The distinguished history of Indian Army dates back more than ten thousand years. The two grand epics of 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharata' constitute the fundamental framework around which the edifice of Indian Army is built. The massive war 'Mahabharata', fought at Kurukshetra in north-central India, has left indelible imprints on the Indian psyche. Fought relentlessly for eighteen days in the quest of peace, the force level described in the Epic states 18 'Akshaunis', seven with the 'Pandavas' and eleven with the 'Kauravas', amounting to nearly 400,000 assorted troops fighting on chariots, horses, elephants and foot soldiers." These lines show how much the army carries the history and traditions of ancient times.

Having established that the need for discipline is the fourth angle of the leadership triangle, we will now examine the views on discipline of one of the greatest soldiers of the army, Field Marshal HormusjiFramjiJamshedjiManekshaw, MC, widely known as Sam Manekshaw and/or Sam Bahadur, who was the Chief of the Army Staff of the Indian Army during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, and the first Indian Army officer to be promoted to the rank of Field Marshal.

The Field Marshal and Discipline

On 11 November 1998 (the fact that the views of the Field Marshal are over two decades old is not a deterrent or in any way subtracting from the quality or relevance of what he said). These views are as valid today as they were when he spoke them while giving a talk at the Defence Services College, Wellington on Leadership and Discipline, while addressing future officers of the army. We will first take a look at what he had to say about leadership because that is the window through which he approached the topic of discipline. For him discipline and leadership were part and parcel of the same package; one cannot be a leader without discipline. "Commandant, Ladies and Gentlemen, do not misunderstand me, when I say [we suffer from] lack of political leadership. I do not mean just political leadership. Of course, there is lack of leadership, but also there is lack of leadership in every walk of life, whether it is political, administrative, in our educational institutions, or whether it is our sports organizations. Wherever you look, there is lack of leadership. I do not know whether leaders are born or made."

To expand on this, the first pillar of discipline for leadership is having professional knowledge and professional competence. The second is the ability to make up your mind to make a decision and accept full responsibility for that decision. In the words of the Field Marshal, "Have you ever wondered why people do not make a decision? The answer is quite simple. It is because they lack professional competence, or they are worried that their decision may be wrong and they will have to carry the can. According to the law of averages, if you take ten decisions, five ought to be right. If you have professional knowledge and professional competence, nine will be right, and the one that might not be correct will probably be put right by a subordinate officer or a colleague. But if you do not take a decision, you are doing something wrong. An act of omission is much worse than an act of commission. An act of commission can be put right. An act of omission cannot.

When we talk of discipline or read what the Field Marshal had to say about the meaning of the word, we realize that discipline can be of many kinds. In order to keep it relatively straightforward we will look at discipline from two angles firstly the angle of bureaucracy and secondly the angle of freedom (but within limits). It is easy to see that the Field Marshal referred to the latter when he spoke of discipline. To have a disciplined force under an officer is entirely different from having a force which is constrained by the forces of bureaucracy. Usually when we hear the word discipline, the thought which comes to mind is of strictness bounded by rules which are not meant to be broken. To be more specific, the objectives of organizational discipline are:

- to obtain a willing acceptance of the rules, regulations and procedures of an organization by its employees so that organizational goals can be achieved,
- to impart an element of certainty despite several differences in informal behaviours pattern and other related changes in an organization, and
- to develop among the employees a spirit of tolerance and a desire to make adjustments.

The operative words in these three clauses are 'willing acceptance', 'element of certainty' and 'spirit of tolerance'. The reader will realize that without the confluence of these three terms, discipline becomes non-existent or, in a worst case scenario, it becomes permeated with unbearable constraints which will be counter- productive to the very objective discipline is meant to propagate. The Field Marshal knew what constituted discipline from the years he spent in the army and we have already seen that the army because its long history, knew the meaning of discipline fully. How did this disciplined attitude of Field Marshal Manekshaw reveal itself? We came across an old incident with the Field Marshal Manekshaw, where he is talking about an encounter with a Pakistan Subedar Major and other soldiers after the 1971 war in which India had taken 93,000 Pakistani soldiers as prisoners of war. It is to be noted that as the Chief of the Army Staff, the then General Manekshaw was responsible for their well-being. The General was visiting the place where the Pakistani soldiers were being held and he asked a Pakistani Subedar Major: "Can I come in? Are there mosquitos/bugs on the bed? Do you have sufficient mosquito nets? Is the food here fine and can I taste it"? He then went near the washroom area where a cleaner was doing his work and wanted to shake hands with him, but he politely refused. The General asked him "what's the matter, you didn't shake hands with me". The cleaner replied, "Sir, now I know the

reason behind India's victory in the war against Pakistan. You know how to treat your men and hamare wale apneaapkonawaabjaadesamajhtehai." ('our officers consider themselves no less than a prince').

The biggest contribution of the Field Marshal was to instil a sense of duty, efficiency and professionalism in a modern Indian Army and to stand up to political and bureaucrats. As Bagchi (2009) indicated, tough situations bring the best out of the professionals as the latter lead from the front, take responsibility for their failures and take monumental decisions as well; moreover, they also know the balance between logic and intuition. Professionalism and discipline have a symbiotic relationship and go hand in hand. A true professional with a sense of justice and fair play, the Field Marshal epitomized what it was to be a disciplined leader. To give an example of the genesis of these qualities, the Indian Military Academy located in the Doon Valley, of which he is a product, expects its graduates to uphold the highest moral and ethical values. Inscribed in the oak paneling at the eastern entrance of the Chetwode Hall is the Academy's credo, excerpted from the speech of Field Marshal Chetwode at the inauguration of the Academy in 1932 (known as the Chetwode Code).

The safety, honour and welfare of your country come first, always and every time.

The honour, welfare and comfort of the men you command come next.

Your own ease, comfort and safety come last, always and every

— Field Marshal Philip Chetwode

To look at the idea of military discipline from the perspective of the British army (we chose the British army because of its obvious links with the Indian army), what the former has to say about discipline has an uncanny parallel with the values held by Field Marshal Manekshaw; this is also very understandable. The following extract about discipline in the British army is from their official website. "Respect for Others reflects our belief that everyone is born free and equal in dignity. It follows that everyone must be treated fairly and with dignity and respect regardless of: gender; ethnicity (including nationality); sexual orientation; age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage or civil partnership; $pregnancy\ and\ maternity;\ religion;\ belief\ or\ non-belief;\ rank$ and position. There is no place in the British Army for prejudice or discrimination, whether in person or online. Only by treating each other fairly and with respect, can we ensure that every officer and soldier in the Army fulfils their potential."

"Respect for Others applies equally to all individuals: victims of conflict; the dead; the wounded; prisoners and civilians. We will not succeed on operations, maintain the respect of the Nation or get the best from those we encounter, be they individuals, partners or allies, unless we demonstrate Respect for Others in all that we do".

The point we are making in this section is that without discipline, by which we mean an inherent discipline that permeates throughout the organization (which includes, NGOs, the armed forces, the various government institutions, corporate entities, educational institutions, sports bodies, cooperatives, banking organizations, and so on), the inherent strength of the entity is weakened to a point where it cannot

grow and flourish; that is to say, one aspect of discipline for us is the ability to control yourself or other people, even in difficult situations. As we have seen, the Indian army has this discipline as exemplified by Field Marshal Manekshaw, and in the next section we will look at how discipline functions in the corporate sector.

The Corporate Perspective

We will now examine the discipline through the lens of leadership, just as we did in the earlier section dealing with military (army) discipline. Leadership as many of us know, comes in many shapes and forms; we have charismatic leaders, servant leaders, democratic leaders, laissez faire leaders, strategic leaders, transformational leaders etc. etc. all of them display their inherent discipline in different ways and in some instances the thread of discipline may be common (i.e. display the same characteristics) and be present in more than one category. Just like we approached discipline through the window of leadership in the section on army discipline, we will in this paper approach corporate discipline taking the route of Level 5 leadership and examine how a leader belonging to this category displays her discipline to the world and the company she leads. But first of all what is Level 5 leadership? Level 5 leadership is a concept developed in the book Good to Great, referred to by us earlier, written by Jim Collins. Level 5 leaders display a powerful mixture of personal humility and indomitable will which is also paradoxical by itself as they are not complementing characteristics in an individual but are polar opposites. These leaders are incredibly ambitious, but their ambition is first and foremost for the cause, for the organization and its purpose, not themselves. While Level 5 leaders can come in many personality packages, they are often self-effacing, quiet, reserved, and even shy. Every goodto-great transition (from a good company to a great company) in the research done by Collins and his team showed that the transition began with a Level 5 leader who motivated the enterprise more with inspired standards than inspiring personality. In the words of Collins, "the good-togreat executives were all cut from the same cloth. It didn't matter whether the company was consumer or industrial, in crisis or steady state, offered services or products. It didn't matter when the transition took place or how big the company. All the good-to-great companies had Level 5 leadership at the time of transition. Furthermore, the absence of Level 5 leadership showed up as a consistent pattern in the comparison companies. Given that Level 5 leadership cuts against the grain of conventional wisdom, especially the belief that we need larger-than-life saviors with big personalities to transform companies, it is important to note that Level 5 is an empirical finding, not an ideological one."(emphasis added).

As far as discipline is concerned goes, again in the words of Collins, "it is very important to grasp that Level 5 leadership is not just about humility and modesty. It is equally about ferocious resolve, an almost stoic determination to do whatever needs to be done to make the company great." What exactly does this mean from the perspective of discipline? It means that a level 5 leader has a ruthless core of discipline inside her and this comes to the surface only when it is needed and needed for taking the company forward. Such leaders are rare in the corporate world and it is the focus they bring to the job which is the differentiating element in how they perceive their role in the company. The crux then is the refined focus and the determination (in

other words, discipline) to succeed that singles out the Level 5 leader. Or to look at this in another way, the three pillars on which the Level 5 leader bases his thought processes mirror this discipline; and these pillars are a) creativity, b) communication, and c) pattern recognizing. We will now look at the specific way in which these pillars contribute to disciplined leadership.

Creativity –the creativity seen in a Level 5 leader is different from the creativity seen in ordinary leaders. This creativity should be intrinsic and at the same time be of a kind which will permeate all those who come in contact with the Level 5 leader. In other words, the Level 5 leader should be able to accomplish his super ordinate goal using the transmitted creativity in order to instil it in other employees. Creativity should be used as a medium of self-expression and organization building so that it becomes an enabling factor to build the company or transform the company. Anand Mahindra of Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd. for example has this ability to create foundations (both systemic from a technical/manufacturing point and interpersonal) inside the company so that his employees and also the outside world realize the uniqueness of Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd. We will however not go deeper into the topic of whether he is a Level 5 leader or not as that is not the purpose of this paper. It is enough to point to him as an example of a creator who is very difficult to match in this sphere of activity in a company.

Communication - this aspect should be the main mechanism which will tell other employees what you have in mind as a Level 5 leader in terms of transforming the company. From a different perspective, this means that the leader will have built mechanisms using communication, which will carry on his aims even if were to drop out of the scene for some reason. For the record, putting in place such mechanisms which will outlive the leader is one aspect of how a Level 5 leader works; communication is used a platform to disseminate the vision and ensure it survives the individual however large she may loom in the history of the company. Again, Anand Mahindra also has this ability to communicate inside the company to his employees and to the outside world so that they are aware fully of his vision. (He also confronts the brutal facts which is another trait of the Level 5 leader; he does not flinch away from it. For example, Mahindra & Mahindra owned SsangYong Motor Company (Korean owned) filed for bankruptcy in December 2020. While there are enough instances of failed overseas acquisitions, the company — bought from a court receivership by an Indian company — heading back to bankruptcy after a decade is unheard of. As Mahindra & Mahindra is very serious about capital allocation, it was not willing to put money in a difficult business anymore and so they terminated the relationship cleanly and quickly.

Pattern Recognizing - the ability to recognize patterns in disparate bits of data coming to a manager (or in our case a leader) is a trait which some people are born with, though it is also a trait which can be cultivated and refined through practice over long years of working. Leaders make decisions largely through unconscious processes that neuroscientists call pattern recognition and emotional tagging. These processes usually make for quick, effective decisions, but they can be distorted by self-interest, emotional attachments, or misleading memories; the reality is that important decisions made by intelligent, responsible people with the best information and intentions are sometimes hopelessly flawed. The judgment calls they make are

incorrect and can severely affect the functioning of the company. Campbell, Whitehead and Finkelstein (2009) said that "faced with a new situation, we make assumptions based on prior experiences and judgments. Thus a chess master can assess a chess game and choose a high-quality move in as little as six seconds by drawing on patterns he or she has seen before. But pattern recognition can also mislead us. When we're dealing with seemingly familiar situations, our brains can cause us to think we understand them when we don't."

The true Level 5 leader avoids all these assumptions based on her prior experience and reads patterns correctly. Behn (2017) said leaders should learn to understand "the less obvious patterns of problems, opportunities, and strategies. If a manager cannot recognize the "shape" of a problem—its key features—how can he or she begin to solve it? And, of course, a manager can't identify a problem's key features if he or she has not accumulated a large mental data bank of experience with a wide variety of problems." What Behn is essentially saying is that there are two ways of looking at problems, opportunities and strategies. The first is the 'obvious way' - which means that the three are analysed and understood at a primary level; the manager or leader does not try and go behind the three issues and see how she can capitalize on them. We will look at just one example to make this point clear. If for example, the implications of the surge in oil prices put in place by the Middle Eastern countries had been better anticipated and understood, we would not have had to struggle to find alternative sources of power for producing energy. We finally did it, but there was considerable delay in using shale gas, electricity and hybrid power (the latter two for automobiles). Those automakers who saw into the future (like Tesla, and many Japanese brands) have now got around the problem of rising oil prices to a certain extent and are now capitalizing on the expensive prices of oil to build vehicles which do not need to use diesel or petrol. The automobile makers who saw the emerging change in markets which was a resultant of the oil price surge, did much better than those who did not.

Raycap (2018) in their blog says that "a new National Geographic documentary titled "Before the Flood" features an interview with Musk where he proposes a "global shift toward a more localized clean energy system of solar panels and batteries." We have looked at the way discipline operates in the corporate world and in the next section we will analyse one leader who we feel has the desired qualities which taken together represent the intricacies and importance of corporate discipline.

A Level 5 Leader from India

As an example of a Level 5 leader, we will look at AzimPremji of Wipro as the corporate counterpart of Field Marshal Manekshaw and look at his approach to discipline. Thanks to substantial increases in technology stocks, Wipro's value skyrocketed in the late 1990s, and Premji became one of the richest entrepreneurs in the world—a position he retained well into the 21st century. The success of both the company and its chairman was more than merely the result of outside forces' inflating the value of the company, however. Premji had boldly broken with tradition by transforming Wipro into an information technology powerhouse with a solid footing in foreign markets at a time when most fortunes in India were based on ownership of land and factories used to produce domestically consumed goods. In 1999 Premji

officially completed his degree from Stanford through a distance-learning arrangement.

"Despite his vast personal wealth, Premji continued to be recognized for his modesty, lack of extravagance, and charity. In 2001 he established the non-profit AzimPremji Foundation, through which he aimed to improve the quality of elementary education in rural regions throughout India. By the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the foundation had extended computer-aided education to more than 16,000 schools, with child-friendly content increasingly available in local languages. Premji's reputation remained that of a highly ethical entrepreneur whose operation served firms." model for other Indian (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Azim-Premji).

Addressing students at the fifth convocation of the AzimPremji University on 20 August 2017, Premji said: "I have been extraordinarily lucky in having friends, teachers, family, and colleagues who have opened unthinkable opportunities in life for me. With this realization comes the conclusion that personal humility is a true reflection of gratitude to all these special people. In our work, we will continuously realize how important humility is. Remember that anything may happen at any time to take away your pride, but no one can take away your humility." On maintaining integrity, he said: "Life is built on a strong foundation of integrity. Integrity is also about delivering on your commitments to everyone. The highest form of integrity is the commitment you make to yourself."

In AzimPremji's words, "If I were to point out the top characteristic that has made Wipro what it is, it would simply be tenacity and hard work". Leading Wipro through four decades of expansion and growth, AzimPremji has emerged not just as one of the global leaders in the software industry but a conscientious philanthropist. Wipro is a now one of the leading companies in the domain of global information technology, consulting and business processing. In a talk with Business Today TV (2019) he shares his success mantra as integrity in doing what you say and saying what you do, honouring your commitments, being ethical beyond doubt, honesty and fairness in action. These are the characteristics of an inspiring business leader. Premji, is unique insofar as he has the twin qualities in him of a Level 5 leader - professional will and personal humility as can be seen from the foregoing paragraphs.

Conclusions

But the factor which sets corporate discipline apart from military discipline is the element of 'democratic discipline' present in the former category. By this we mean that an order in the corporate world can be questioned; it cannot be so questioned in the military world. After all, civilian life does not have the same clear chain of command as the US Army. As Collins (2006), said while quoting an army captain in West Point, "the Army has a clear chain of command, but Army leaders face one giant reality that business leaders rarely face: in business, if you make bad decisions, people lose money, and perhaps jobs," he said. "In the military, if you make bad decisions, nations can fall and people can die."

That is an important phrase: people can die. In the Army, it matters to your very existence if the leaders are competent. It is also of importance that the leaders are trustworthy. It matters if your leaders care more about themselves than they do about their people or the mission, and this is because your life may well depend on it. Combine this truth with the

larger mission of protecting national interest and advancing the cause of freedom, and you get a context for leadership rarely faced in the normal course of business. To loop back to Field Marshal Manekshaw, the foundation of his talk which was quoted earlier in this paper is based on this premise.

The fourth angle of the leadership angle is therefore not just a catchy phrase to capture the mind of the reader. It genuinely exists in the leadership world and is to be given the importance it deserves. Perhaps it if the most important angle which leaders should be aware of while going about their day to day work.

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